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RUEHYN/AMEMBASSY SANAA 1789  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASMARA 000375

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SUBJECT: SOMALI OPPOSITION IN ERITREA; HANGING OUT AND  
SPEAKING UP

REF: ASMARA 316

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Classified By: AMB. Scott H. DeLisi for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Asmara is full of Somali opposition these days with Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) and Hussein Aideed, Hawiye/Haber Gedir clan leader and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Deputy Prime Minister, joining the exiled Somali Members of Parliament (MPs) resident in Eritrea. In separate conversations with Poloff, Aideed and the Somalia MPs expressed common positions, calling for: Ethiopia's immediate departure from Somalia; the need for a more inclusive reconciliation conference occurring outside of Somalia; the Somali people to be the solution to Somali problems; and in voicing their frustration toward the United States. Shabait, the official website of the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE), reported that President Isaias met with Sheikh Sharif on April 9 and expressed similar positions. Eritrea appears to be heading into a role of permanent host to some of the Somali opposition. END SUMMARY.

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HUSSEIN AIDEED: FREELANCING A POLITICAL SOLUTION  
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12. (C) On April 11, Poloff met with Hussein Aideed and exiled MP/TFG Minister of Women's Affairs, Fowsiya Mohammed Sheikh Hassan. Admitting he came to Eritrea without President Yusuf's blessing and was operating independently from the TFG, Aideed asserted he was seeking a "political solution and not a military one" to the problems facing Somalia. Aideed maintained he wanted to see TFG President Yusuf, Prime Minister Gedi and the deposed Speaker, Sheikh Adan work together in Somalia to achieve peace and stability. He denied the rumors that he and the disenfranchised MPs were trying to establish a government-in-exile, noting that the only Somali government-in-exile would occur if President

Yusuf and PM Gedi go to Addis Ababa. Both he and Fowsiya professed support for a reconciliation conference to be held in a neutral location such as France, Sweden, Jordan or Djibouti and attended by all Somali stakeholders including the TFG, the CIC, the exiled MPs, civil society and the diaspora. Notwithstanding several anti-USG comments, Aideed requested U.S. humanitarian assistance to Somalia, including food drops and medical support.

13. (C) Flip-flopping from previous statements, Aideed called for Ethiopia's immediate withdrawal from Somalia. He did, however, feel strongly that Ethiopia's exit must be done in a manner that provides Ethiopia and President Meles with an honorable out. He asserted that Ethiopia's presence in Somalia was preventing the fighting of terrorism in the Horn of Africa. He expressed concern that the instability in Somalia was distracting from the fight against terrorists and possibly creating an environment in which terrorism could fester and grow.

14. (C) Aideed said he came to Eritrea at President Isaias' invitation after meeting for three days with the GSE Minister of Information Ali Abdu in Dubai. Noting Isaias' long history with Somalia, Aideed said he came to encourage President Isaias to contribute constructively to a peace process in Somalia, in particular to support AU and UN peacekeepers to work together with Ugandan President Museveni. Aideed expressed his concern that Eritrea was creating a proxy war in Somalia in order to focus Ethiopia's attention on Somalia and keep Ethiopia from invading Eritrea.

While Aideed remained hopeful that he could convince Isaias to support AU/UN peacekeepers in Somalia, the President had yet to consent. Aideed asserted that President Museveni, as a senior statesman in Africa, should lead an African initiative, adding that Isaias had agreed on another

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delegation between Uganda and Eritrea.

15. (C) Aideed commented that the CIC has a role to play in resolving Somalia's current problems. When asked about his relationship with the CIC, Aideed denied meeting with Sheikh Sharif in Eritrea yet inadvertently let slip they would both attend a dinner on April 12. (Comment: Post dismisses his denial of meeting with Sheikh Sharif, as both reportedly stayed at the Intercontinental Hotel on the night of April 8.

An Egyptian diplomat in Asmara told Poloff that Aideed admitted to him he and Sheikh Sharif had met in another Gulf State. End Comment.)

16. (C) Aideed said he planned to travel to Dubai on Sunday, April 15 and then, travel on to Kampala the middle of that week to meet personally with President Museveni. According to Aideed, Fowsiya and Speaker Adan plan to travel to Kampala as well.

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SOMALI MPS: ETHIOPIANS AND YUSUF MUST GO  
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17. (C) In a meeting with Poloff on April 10, exiled MPs Sharif Salah Mohammad Ali, Mr. Ahmed Dirje and Mr. Omar Haji adamantly declared that Ethiopia must leave Somalia immediately. As a foreign invader, Ethiopia is a destabilizing influence. Sharif commented that the departure of Ethiopian troops will not worsen security. "Ethiopia did not introduce security, therefore their departure will not create a vacuum," he noted. According to Sharif, the Ethiopians are scaring off other African nations; as long as Ethiopia is present in Somalia the other African nations will not send peacekeeping troops. He further described the Ugandan troops as being misled by Ethiopia. He repeated his position that only when Ethiopian troops depart Somalia will the MPs return to their homeland. He also denied the MPs were establishing a government-in-exile.

18. (C) The MPs voiced strong opposition to President Yusuf's continued leadership. Stepping away from previous statements by the MPs that President Yusuf had a role to play (reftel); Sharif pointedly stated that President Yusuf "is no longer the legal president of Somalia." Calling the proposed (and now postponed) April 16 reconciliation conference in Mogadishu a "joke," Sharif declared the meeting would not be inclusive because many Somalis, including the MPs, do not feel safe returning to Mogadishu. Sharif favored Cairo or Djibouti as a better and safer location for a reconciliation conference. He then accused President Yusuf and Prime Minister Gedi of stealing money from the international community, claiming the money they are receiving for the proposed conference will not be spent for this purpose.

19. (C) As for Eritrea's role, Sharif said that the GSE was providing them refuge only and paying for their accommodation at the Ambassoira/Hamassien Hotel in Asmara. He claimed that after the MPs were deported from Kenya in January, they had nowhere else to go and the Eritreans had offered them safehaven. He noted that most of the MPs had never been in Eritrea. Regarding Eritrea's support to the CIC, Sharif agreed that the Eritreans had provided support to the CIC, but did not offer details as to the type and extent. Sharif said the MPs had not met with CIC leader Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed in Asmara but had spoken with Aideed. (Comment: Given that Ibrahim Adou, the former Foreign Minister of the CIC attended the Somali Diaspora meeting in the UK with the TGF MPs, post believes that the MPs likely have met with Sheikh Sharif Ahmed. End Comment.)

110. (C) Denying claims that the MPs are a predominantly Hawiye-led opposition; Sharif said the group has clan and geographical diversity with MPs from Somaliland and Puntland.

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He explained that less than half the MPs come from the Hawiye clan.

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GSE MEDIA REPORT ON SHEIKH SHARIF'S MEETING WITH ISAIAS  
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111. (U) GSE website www.shabait.com reported that Sheikh Sharif met with President Isaias in Asmara on April 9. Sheikh Sharif's comments in the article were limited: he commended the GSE for their support of the Somali people, avowed the unity of the Somali people and asserted the Somalis must themselves build a united and sovereign Somalia. The President's comments dominated the report. Isaias identified the CIC "as part and parcel of the noble opposition of the Somali people against aggression" and repeated his oft-heard position against foreign intervention in Somalia. He furthermore compared the peace and stability of Somalia (under the CIC) with the "carnage of war and turmoil" following the Ethiopian invasion and averred that the current war in Somalia is the "outcome of the wrong U.S. strategy."

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ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT EXPRESSED BY ALL  
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112. (C) In all of the conversations, anti-American sentiment was strong. Although prefacing their remarks with claims of friendship with the U.S., the Somali MPs, Aideed and Fowsiya placed blame for the current situation squarely on America's doorstep. All claimed that the Somalis did not blame Ethiopia, but rather the U.S. for supporting Ethiopia's invasion. Sharif blamed the USG for encouraging Ethiopia to attack Somalia in the name of the "war on terrorism" and the USG efforts to track down "three or five thugs." They pondered whether the U.S. was, in fact anti-Islam, and proposed that a more constructive U.S. policy for Somalia might repair the U.S.'s image in the Islamic world. Fowsiya was the most forceful in her accusations, stating that the

U.S. is pushing the Somalis toward the terrorists and if the destruction in Somalia continues, the Somali people will be forced to seek revenge. She pressed for the U.S. to tell Ethiopia to withdraw. She also relayed a rumor circulating in Baidoa claiming that A/S Frazer had provided money to President Yusuf to use to stir up the clan factionalism.

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COMMENT  
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¶13. (C) Hussein Aideed and Sheikh Sharif's simultaneous presence does not appear to be a random coincidence but rather one orchestrated by the GSE. How the GSE will proceed with their coterie of Somali dissidents at this time remains unclear; however, it does appear that the Somali MPs, at least, have found a second home in Eritrea, with no indication that they plan to leave anytime soon. End Comment.

MINIMIZE CONSIDERED  
DeLisi